

Marketing

Overview

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Child Nutrition Programs, including the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, Special Milk Program, and Afterschool Snack Program, help ensure that children have access to healthy, balanced food choices. These USDA funded programs expose students to a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and foods low in fat and sodium. Marketing techniques can help develop interest in the food programs which may increase participation. The Smarter Lunchrooms Movement, which focuses on behavioral economics, is a great marketing tool.

Terminology

Behavioral Economics - The practice of altering the physical environment in order to affect purchasing and consumption behavior.

Customers –Students, since they make the ultimate choice to participate in the meal programs. Parents also can be considered customers.

Marketing – Activities that promote, advertise, distribute, and sell goods and services to customers.

What is Marketing?

Marketing is creating the perception that what is being offered is desirable and is of good value, which encourages the purchase of the good or service. Smarter Lunchrooms is a USDA-funded research center working to equip school lunchrooms with evidence-based tools that improve child eating behaviors and thus improve the health of children. Smarter Lunchrooms uses six key principles based on research of various environmental cues (physical and social) that influence eating behaviors. These guiding principles to consider are: manage portion sizes, increase convenience, improve visibility, enhance taste expectations, utilize suggestive selling, and set smart pricing strategies.

Research has shown that most food decisions are heavily influenced by the environment, including details such as: the size of the food container or what everyone else is eating (versus our own internal hunger cues). Research also has identified that lunchrooms can be rearranged to nudge students to make healthier choices. The Smarter Lunchrooms research center works to identify and develop practical, evidence-based strategies to shape school environments to support and encourage healthful food choices and behaviors without forcing food choices. This strategy has the added benefit of minimizing food waste since the student is the one making the decision to select the healthier items.

Why is Marketing important?

Marketing Child Nutrition Programs to student customers encourages participation. Participation may expose children to new foods. Increased participation is also important for the viability of a site's Child Nutrition Programs. High levels of participation reflect that children are satisfied and happy with the food choices and, therefore, will select the school meals being offered over other choices.

Resources

Additional resources may be available for this topic. Please check the Idaho School Nutrition Reference Guide website for copies of manuals, user guides and helpful links to relevant subject matter.